

LIST OF CURRENT CLAIMS

Claims 1-17 (Canceled)

18. (New) A method of making decorative panels of stone material or the like, wherein:

- a stack is formed comprising parallel slabs of the decorative stone material and of additional layers, comprising framework layers and separating layers between panels;

- the stack is placed inside a liquid-tight container, interposing filling elements at least between one head of the stack and one wall of the container if the stack has a length smaller than the container;

- a depression is created in the container, said depression being maintained while feeding a hardenable binder, intended for impregnating and encapsulating the stack, the binder being of a material that does not adhere to the separating layers;

- the binder is let or made to harden so to obtain a monolithic block that is then cut to produce raw panels comprising at least one decorative slab joined to at least one framework layer;

wherein possible size differences among slabs in the stack are compensated; filling elements are also introduced or formed in the container in order to fill empty spaces left from a stack having a length smaller than the container; and, as filling elements, expandable elements are at least partially employed.

19. (New) The method according to claim 18, wherein, in order to compensate said size differences among slabs, onto one or more edges of small size slabs, additions of high density expandable material are made that fill the recesses existing on the sides of the stack in correspondence to said small size slabs.

20. (New) The method according to claim 19, wherein said high density expandable material is fed in the container at the liquid state and it is let or made to expand before feeding the binder.

21. (New) The method according to claim 18, wherein, in order to compensate said differences among the slabs sizes, during the stack formation, along one or more edges of small size slabs, stiff elements are arranged, capable of being joined by the binder to the respective slabs.

22. (New) The method according to claim 21, wherein said stiff elements comprise elements made of the same slabs material.

23. (New) The method according to claim 18, wherein said filling elements comprise elements of high density expandable material fed in the container at the liquid state and made or let to expand before feeding the binder.

24. (New) The method according to claim 19, wherein said filling elements are elements of high density expandable material fed in the container at the liquid state and made or let to expand before feeding the binder.

25. (New) The method according to claim 24, wherein said filling elements are made of the same expandable material used for said additions, and are formed simultaneously thereto.

26. (New) The method according to claim 23, wherein, in order to make said filling elements, solid elements are employed obtained by expanding said expandable material and recovered after cutting, said elements providing for an approximate adaptation between the sizes of the stack and the container, liquid expandable material being added to said elements so to fill the remaining empty spaces.

27. (New) The method according to claim 19, wherein said high density expandable material is polyurethane.

28. (New) The method according to claim 24, wherein said high density expandable material is polyurethane.

29. (New) The method according to claim 18, wherein said filling elements comprise air cushions.

30. (New) The method according to claim 18, wherein, during the stack formation, a framework layer is applied onto each of the main sides of each slab of stone material, each framework layer being associated to a separating layer and the cutting operation producing raw panels comprising a decorative slab provided with a framework layer on both sides.

31. (New) The method according to claim 18, wherein, while creating the depression in the container and feeding the binder, the stack is heated so to be brought up to a temperature such as to allow, upon reaching the wanted vacuum conditions, the humidity present in the stack to evaporate.

32. (New) The method according to claim 31, wherein the water vapour originating from the evaporation is made to freeze.

33. (New) The method according to claim 31, wherein, during impregnation, a washing of the container with inert gases is carried out in order to eliminate any humidity residual.

34. (New) The method according to claim 31, wherein the binder is made to harden by applying a pressure higher than the atmospheric pressure.

35. (New) The method according to claim 34, wherein, upon termination of the binder consolidation, the block is cut along planes perpendicular to the layers, up to a depth such as to remove the solidified binder, the possible filling elements and the edge portions of the layers.

36. (New) A decorative panel comprising at least a decorative slab of stone material or the like joined to at least one framework layer, obtained through a method according to claim 18.